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homemakers' chat

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U.S. DEPARTMENT
OF AGRICULTURE

Friday, April 17, 1942

SUBJECT: "OUTWIT THE CLOTHES MOTH". Information from the Bureau of Home Economics, U. S. Department of Agriculture.

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Today I have some suggestions of ways to outwit those winged enemies of wool--the common clothes moths. I know you don't want to take any chances of letting the clothes moth get the upperhand this summer. For those winter wools you'll be putting away soon are going to be more valuable than ever next fall.

So here are my tips--from the entomologists and home economists of the U. S. Department of Agriculture.

First of all--say these experts--you have to be on the alert. For there are likely to be some moths in almost any house or apartment at any time of the year. You don't want to wait until you see a moth or evidence of moth damage before you take measures to prevent them.

And one of the best year-round offensives against moths is good housekeeping. That means keeping all floors and rugs well swept. Moths often get a start in the part of a rug that is difficult to sweep thoroughly--such as under a heavy piece of furniture or close to the wall.

Eliminate all possible breeding places for moths. Never let wool rags or old wool clothes lie carelessly around the house. Don't let lint or hair accumulate in floor cracks or under the baseboards. And if you have a pet dog or cat--don't let their hairs accumulate in the basement. Moths like to eat hair, and feathers--and fur, as well as wool.

As for your clothes closet--be sure to sun and brush garments you don't wear often. Ordinarily, moths don't bother clothes that you wear right along. But they

are likely to set up housekeeping in a wool coat or dress that hangs in the back of a dark closet for weeks at a time.

Now a suggestion or two about storing wool clothes.

Naturally, you'll want to clear closets of most wool clothes for the summer--for safety as well as convenience. These clothes may be sent to reliable commercial establishments. Or you can store them at home with a little time and trouble.

Store wool garments, gloves, and shoes separately from clothing of rayon, cotton, linen, or silk. These other fibers need no protection from moths.

Before you store the clothes be sure they have no moths--no moth larvae--or moth eggs on them when you put them away. The moths themselves aren't likely to be on the clothing. For they fly away the minute they get out in the sunlight. But the tiny soft, white moth eggs can easily slip by undetected. And in 4 to 8 days of summer heat an egg hatches into the larvae or worm that does the real destructive work.

Dry cleaning kills moths--and destroys their eggs and larvae. So does washing with a strong solution of neutral soap. And so will a good sunning and airing if you accompany it with brisk brushing. Moths can't stand bright sun--the larvae drop to the ground--and you can easily crush and remove the eggs with brushing.

Once you get the clothing free of moths--you can put them away in paper bags--you can wrap them in paper. You can seal them in boxes. Or you can store them in trunks, chests, or tight closets. Remember though--always put paper bags and bundles where they are not likely to get torn. Moths won't eat through paper--but they will take advantage of a tear to get inside.

If you store them in trunks and chests--make sure they have tight fitting lids. And if you set aside a closet especially for storing wools--make sure all cracks in plaster and around baseboards are filled with crack filler. And see that there's a gasket on the door so it can fit tight all around.

And now just a word about an extra protection for your stored wool clothing.

There's always a chance that there may be some moth larvae or eggs in the clothing you store. So it's a good idea to play safe by using flake napthalene, or paradichlorobenzene, or moth balls which contain one or both of these chemicals. As these chemicals evaporate they give off a gas. This gas first discourages the moth larvae from feeding on the wool. Then if the gas is concentrated enough it actually kills the moth larvae. That's the reason you want to use these chemicals generously--so the gas will be concentrated enough to actually kill the larvae.

Tie these crystals or balls in a cloth sack--and hang them on the neck of a hanger inside a paper dress or coat protector. Sprinkle the flaked chemicals or the moth balls generously between the folds of clothing in boxes and chests and trunks. And if you are setting aside a special closet--put the chemicals on the top shelf of the closet. Or hang them in muslin bags from hooks on the wall.

About 1 pound of flake napthalene or paradicholorobenzene is a safe amount to use in a small chest, trunk, or wooden box. For a large closet or store room--use a pound of crystals to every hundred cubic feet. It's better to overdose than underdose and these chemicals are cheap.

And just one final word of warning--Don't open the chest or the closet--or the place where you store your wools any more than is absolutely necessary. If the gas is to do its work it has to be concentrated. And it won't stay concentrated if you keep opening the lid or door and letting it out.

